

with historical characters like Aaron Burr or Chinese Gordon. And as we learn more about them, these fanciful creatures of Lord Dunsany's brain assume still more familiar characteristics, as if they had been studied in some Irish village or English street. It is this fact that reveals one of the main secrets of Lord Dunsany's appeal: that behind all his exuberant imagination lies a solid basis of observation, enabling him to endow the most impossible adventures with a homely and convincing air.

The five plays contained in the present volume have all been produced on the stage. "The Golden Doom" and "The Gods of the Mountain" have been staged most successfully at the Haymarket Theatre, London. "King Argimēnēs" and "The Glittering Gate" have been given by the Irish Players, and "The Lost Silk Hat" has been put on by Iden Payne at Manchester. In America, the first three have been in the repertoire of Stuart Walker's Portmanteau Theatre, and "The Glittering Gate" has been given by the Neighborhood Players.

After seeing "The Gods of the Mountain," Frank Harris wrote: "It was one of the nights of my life; the only play, I said to myself, which meant anything to me in twenty years or more." Without sharing the opinion of Mr. Harris about the dramatic output of the last twenty years, I share fully his enthusiasm in regard to the play that caused his remark. The note struck in it is so distinctly new as to make one gasp as under a sharp shock. But the surprise turns quickly into pleasure such as only the originality of genius can confer.

It is hard to define just what makes these plays what they are. But certain qualities are tangible.

THE MODERN DRAMA SERIES
EDITED BY EDWIN BJÖRKMAN

THE GODS OF THE MOUNTAIN : THE GOLDEN
DOOM : KING ARGIMĒNĒS AND THE UN-
KNOWN WARRIOR : THE GLITTERING GATE :
THE LOST SILK HAT : BY LORD DUNSANY

FIVE PLAYS

THE GODS OF THE MOUNTAIN
THE GOLDEN DOOM
KING ARGIMĒNĒS AND THE UNKNOWN WARRIOR
THE GLITTERING GATE
THE LOST SILK HAT

BY
LORD DUNSANY



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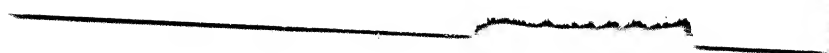
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INTRODUCTION

OBSERVATION and imagination are the basic principles of all poetry. It is impossible to conceive a poetical work from which one of them is wholly absent. Observation without imagination makes for obviousness; imagination without observation turns into nonsense. What marks the world's greatest poetry is perhaps the presence in almost equal proportion of both these principles. But as a rule we find one of them predominating, and from this one-sided emphasis the poetry of the period derives its character as realistic or idealistic.

The poetry of the middle nineteenth century made a fetish of observation. It came as near excluding imagination as it could without ceasing entirely to be poetry. That such exaggeration should sooner or later result in a sharp reaction was natural. The change began during the eighties and gathered full headway in the early nineties. Imagination, so long scorned, came into its rights once more, and it is rapidly becoming the dominant note in the literary production of our own day.

The new movement has been called "neo-romantic" and "symbolistic." Both these names apply, but neither of them exhausts the contents or meaning of the movement which received its first impetus from Ibsen and which later found its typical embodiment in Maeterlinck. From this movement came much of

the inspiration that produced the poetical re-birth of Ireland out of which has sprung the man whom I have now the pleasure of introducing to American readers: a man with imagination as elfish as moonlight mist.

Edward John Moreton Drax Plunkett, Lord Dun-sany, is the eighteenth member of his family to bear the title which gives him a place in the Irish peerage. He was born in 1878 and received his education at Eton and Sandhurst. In 1899 he succeeded his father to the title and the family estate in Meath, Ireland. During the South African war he served at the front with the Coldstream Guards. He is passionately fond of outdoor life and often spends the whole day in the saddle before sitting down at his desk to write late at night.

His work proves, however, that he is as fond of spiritual as of physical exercise, and that he is an inveterate traveller in those mysterious regions of the partly known or wholly unknown where the imagination alone can guide us. His first literary heroes were the brothers Grimm and Andersen. Then the Greek world of Olympians was revealed to him, making a lasting impression on his mind. But it was the Bible that gave him the limpid style which makes his most fantastic tales as real as government reports — or rather much more so. "For years no style seemed to me natural but that of the Bible," he said not long ago, "and I feared that I would never become a writer when I saw that other people did not use it."

For something like ten years he has been a pretty frequent and increasingly valued contributor to English and Anglo-Irish periodicals. He has previously published five volumes: "The Gods of Pegana," 1905;

"Time and the Gods," 1906; "The Sword of Welleran," 1908; "A Dreamer's Tales," 1910; and "The Book of Wonder," 1912. All are collections of prose pieces that defy accepted classifications. They are fairy tales and short stories and essays and prose poems at the same time.

The reader has only to take a brief glance at one of those works to make the astounding discovery that he is being introduced to worlds of which he has never heard before. Even the "Arabian Nights" have a clearly identifiable background of popular legend and myth. Nothing of the kind is to be found in the writings of Lord Dunsany. He may be said to have created a new mythology wholly his own. He is not only the master but the maker of the countries to which he takes us on such fascinating jaunts. His commonest name for them is the Edge of the World, but sometimes he speaks of them as the Lands of Wonder. This latter name is doubly significant, for the whole movement of which he forms such a striking manifestation has been defined as a "renaissance of wonder."

The names of places and persons appearing in the stories of Lord Dunsany are worth a study in themselves. There are hundreds of them, giving evidence of an inexhaustible imagination; and each one of them is as aptly suggestive as if generations of men had been at work shaping them. To hear of Sardathion, the city built by the Gods of Old, is to see its domes of marble rising sky-high in the sunset-lighted air. To hear of Slith and Sippy and Slorg, the three thieves who went to the Edge of the World in quest of the Golden Box, is to feel as if one were dealing